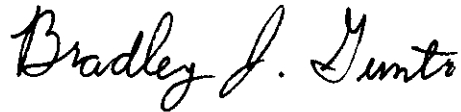


The Millionaire Farmer

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

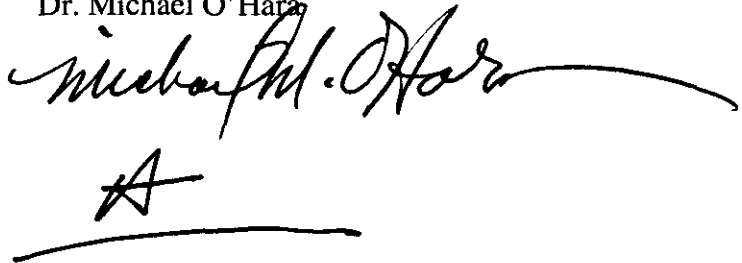
By

Bradley J. Gunter

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bradley J. Gunter". The script is cursive and fluid.

Thesis Advisor

Dr. Michael O'Hara

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael O'Hara". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right. Below the signature is a large, stylized letter "A" followed by another horizontal line.

Ball State University
Muncie, Indiana

May 2005

Expected Date of Graduation- May 2005

1. This previous summer, I was studying in Germany with a Kentucky Institute program. I knew that I would hopefully be studying in Germany again come fall and that I would have to complete my Thesis Project while I was away if I hoped to graduate in May. My two majors are Theatre and German and I have never imagined ever coming across an opportunity to combine the two. But sure enough, there was that German Drama course which I was taking this summer. In this course, we studied a play called "Der Bauer als Millionär" by Ferdinand Raimund. Reading and seeing this play, I was reminded of certain English works that I was familiar with, not to mention very amused. That's about when I thought to myself, "man, this play should be done in English. Wait a minute..." The play is out of copyright and has never been translated. I am very excited to find a project that not only combines both of my majors but that also culminates in the creation of a potential professional product.
2. I am currently registered for HONRS 499 in the fall semester, knowing that I will receive an "I" for the semester and complete the project in the spring.
3. The final outcome of this project is going to be a play. Specifically, an English translation and adaptation of Ferdinand Raimund's "Der Bauer als Millionär." I will also complete a paper detailing my process and the decisions made, as well as conduct research into professional outlets for the finished project, including publishers and theatre companies. I will present my product in a short presentation in the spring.
4. My objective is to write a new play based on an old German one. I hope to have this play professionally produced and published. This is a hilarious script and I hope to convey a good, funny story that remains true to the intent of the original.
5. I will begin my project by doing some minimal research into the playwright and the history of the play itself. With this information, I hope to better understand what the author's intentions were in writing the play and what has proven successful and unsuccessful about it in the time since it was originally produced. Using this understanding, I will approach the play for a rough translation. My goal with this first go around is to create a scene-by-scene synopsis and a literal word-for-word translation of the source material. The second step is to begin re-writing my translation into an original adaptation, consulting with my advisor frequently and making many revisions until I have a satisfactory product.

In addition to my work on the play, I will compose a paper detailing the work I did and the choices I made. I will research drama publishers and professional theatres that accept unsolicited new work. When my project is complete, I will send it out to those outlets.

6. Hopefully, this project fosters in me a greater understanding of the German language and the craft of playwriting. Optimally, I will have work professionally published and performed. In the future I will be able to further explore work in translation and writing. If I succeed, then the Theatre community and English audiences will be able to enjoy a wonderful work that they would otherwise not have been able to.

ANALYSIS

For my Honors Thesis Project, I wrote a translation/adaptation of the German-language Romanticism play *Der Bauer als Millionär* by Ferdinand Raimund. Here I will present a chronological analysis of my process and the decisions made.

Impetus and Action

In June and July of 2004 I participated in a study-abroad program in Munich, Germany. The program, run through Murray State's Kentucky Institute for International Studies, lasted six weeks and included classes in German language and culture. One of those classes focused on German Theatre. During the summer we studied four plays in class and attended productions of the same plays at the Bayerisches Staatsschauspiel, one of Munich's major Theatre companies. One of those plays was Ferdinand Raimund's *Der Bauer als Millionär*.

The play, written in 1826, is an excellent example of Romantic-era Theatre. While many of the conventions used in the play are no longer accessible to today's audiences, I found that the humor and heart of the piece were still very much evident. I soon fell in love with it. At the same time, I was trying to find a project I could undertake during the following academic year for my Honors Thesis Project. I knew I would be participating in another exchange program to Mainz, Germany and was hoping to discover a project that would nicely accompany that. One day in Munich, I was thinking about this play and thought to myself that it could be very successful with English-speaking audiences today. Then came the lightning bolt. I did some research, discovering that there has never been an English translation of the play. I knew what my Thesis Project would be.

I emailed Dr. Michael O'Hara outlining my plan. I would do a rough translation of the original play into English. Then, I would work at adapting my translation into a useable piece of Theatre. Upon completion, I would have a finished, potentially professional product. As part of my work, I would also look into outlets for that finished product. Ideally, I would try to put together an informal reading of my final draft with actors for my Thesis Presentation. Dr. O'Hara liked the idea and agreed to serve as my advisor.

What I loved about this project was the prospect of doing real work that combined my two majors- Theatre and German. I had never imagined that they would ever be of use to each other beyond "putting on a show" in a German class or understanding what Brecht meant when he spoke of his "Verfremdungseffekt". Suddenly, through this project, the idea of translation work and the prospect of using my language skills in the professional theatrical world became new options for me.

Upon my return from Munich, I met with Dr. O'Hara and planned the details and his advising capacities. As I completed the various phases of the project, I would email him my work and he would respond with his comments and suggestions. After meeting with Dean Ruebel and completing a written rationale for the project, I was ready to go.

Rough Translation

Once I got myself situated in Mainz, I began working on my rough translation. Armed with two identical copies of the original text (one in print, one online) I was prepared for any eventuality. I started going through the play page-by-page, line-by-line, doing an as-close-to-literal-as-possible translation into English. My tools were my handy English/German dictionary, which I soon found inadequate for the complexity of 1820's Austrian language I was dealing with, and a number of online language resources I sought out. I found translation databases and online dictionaries, including those of the 19th through 21st Centuries as well as one of Austrian slang. These proved invaluable to me, but even they couldn't cover every difficulty I encountered. I asked friends and colleagues for language help when I got stuck, but I still came across the occasional phrase or two that remained a slight mystery to me.

My goals during this stage were just to get a readable version of the original play into English. While any good "literal" translation involves a significant amount of re-write on the part of the translator to make the text work in the new language, I chose to leave the lines raw and unfinished, opting to keep words, phrases, and grammar closer to the original, even when they didn't make complete sense in the English. I wanted to remain as absolutely true as possible to the German text at this stage, as I wished for my "translation" and "adaptation" phases to remain as distinct as possible. With my knowledge of the German, I was also able to understand the German grammar in English in relation to its original context better than I would have understood my fixed English writing in relation to the original context.

The thing about this phase of the process that surprised me the most was that it was long. I mean really, really long. This took me three months of hard work to complete. I would spend four hours on a single page of the over 70-page script. There were so many words that I didn't immediately know and had to look up, or that had multiple possible meanings I wanted to explore. More than once I found myself wishing for the sweet release of death.

As I went along, I also created a short scene-by-scene synopsis so that when I was finished, I had a mostly-English version of the original play and a brief summary of what was happening in each scene. I sent this information to Dr. O'Hara and we discussed some of the challenges of the language, spectacle, and humor that were too-deeply entrenched in the world of Romanticism. What I needed most of all at this point, was a few weeks to not think about *Der Bauer als Millionär*.

First Adaptation

After I felt sufficiently rested, I got to work on my first crack at a real "adaptation". This process took about three months and was conducted at a much more leisurely pace. Gone were the dictionaries, German friends, and old scripts. My new tools were the rough translation I had completed, my creativity, some advice from Theatre friends, and lots and lots of coffee.

The first thing I needed to do was simplify. I cut a number of minor characters from the story, having some existing characters fulfill two roles from the original. I

arranged the action of the play to fit into eight scenes instead of twenty. This script was roughly the same length as the original, but there were less scene changes and divisions of the action. I wanted the play to flow a little better. I also significantly cut down on the music and spectacle. Instead of songs being used to move the plot, I made it so that only one character sings to himself twice. Many other songs became poems or dialogue. The large-scale spectacle of grand scenery and special-effects which did nothing to further the plot were all removed. The locations did, however, remain the same. I kept all my stage directions very general. I wanted directors and designers to have the decision as to how realistic or abstract they wish these settings and magical happenings to be represented on stage. Instead of detailing, for example, what a nine-pin bowling alley should look like down to the last detail and blinking light, I simply say that they are at a nine-pin bowling alley and that the character bowls. After this character gets a strike, he is rewarded in the original with a magical ring that is delivered to him by a giant mechanical eagle that descends at the back of the stage. I changed this so that the attendant instead hands the ring to him very unceremoniously, making a joke out of the buildup that ends very simply. Basically, I tried to have a bit of fun with some of the outdated conventions and extreme situations.

Another thing that was very important to me at this point was the dialogue. I needed to change these sentence fragments from my translation into real speech. This was the real meat and potatoes of the work I did during this go-around. Even when I felt comfortable with the action of a scene, I needed to work on the dialogue. I re-wrote every single line of the script, in an attempt to make them sound more modern as well as more suited to the slightly-altered characters I was trying to create.

While I felt relatively successful with this draft, I knew that I had to go further. Once Dr. O'Hara had the chance to read my work and reply to me, I discovered that I had even further to go than I had thought. While I had rewritten dialogue, simplified the story and conventions, and shortened the length of the play, it wasn't enough... not by a long shot. It was still very long. The singing and poetry that did linger from the original didn't quite make sense in the story as I had written them. There were still too many characters and unnecessary Romantic scenes and conventions. If I was going to have a bit of fun with them, I needed to *really* have some fun with them. My draft was too married to the original, only making minor alterations and the occasional joke, as opposed to adapting the original for a contemporary English-speaking audience.

Second Adaptation

I knew once when I began working on my second draft that I didn't have much time left before the end of the school year and the end of my Thesis Project work- (about six weeks.) I decided to focus my remaining energies on one major draft revision instead of trying to fit a couple revisions into a short time period. I concentrated on the recommendations Dr. O'Hara made after reading my previous draft, namely to go further along the trail I had begun.

So that's what I did. I spent more time thinking about what I would do than doing it. I really examined all the moments in the play, evaluating which ones were unnecessary or ineffective. I then had to determine why and attempt to correct that. I

eliminated all the music, focusing on poetic imagery and philosophical monologues to convey musical ideas in the characters. I changed a number of the names to more “Americanized” versions of the originals. I managed to cut a couple more characters and about 25 pages from the script. I added passages of dialogue that had no basis in the original but that added humor and characterization to the persons I was creating different from those of Raimund. I tried to play around more with the allegorical figures of the play, calling attention to and having fun with even that convention. I made the characters Youth and Age behave more like contemporary stereotypes of age and youth instead of 1820’s stereotypes of age and youth. Basically, I created a play that was more sure of itself and trying to be something independent of its parent.

Credit and Conclusion

Armed with my “final” draft, I returned from my studies in Germany. I have organized a Reading of this script during finals week. Fellow actors from the Department of Theatre and Dance at Ball State will read through the play, portraying the characters. This will be the presentation part of my project. I have invited friends, family, and other members of the local community to come and listen. Dr. O’Hara will be there as well. By hearing the words read aloud, both he and I will come to understand the play in a newer, more complex way than we ever could through simply reading it ourselves. Hopefully, he and I will better learn what is effective, what isn’t, and what further work should be done.

While this presentation and the submission of this paperwork will conclude my work on my Honors Thesis Project, it will only be the beginning of my work on this play. Through the knowledge I gain from this reading, I will create plans for approaching further revision of my work. Dr. O’Hara’s advise on my latest draft will also prove invaluable. When I began this project, I was hoping that I might have a final product at the end of the academic year. What I have since come to realize is the extreme complexity of the project I undertook and the amount of work necessary to create a satisfactory, potentially professional, product. Following the presentation, I plan to complete a number of further drafts, asking friends, colleagues, and even former professors for advice and feedback. Sometime in the future (ideally within the next year or two), I will have a “sellable” script. I will then take that draft to the professional world.

RESOURCES

For my work on this project, I consulted a number of translation and dictionary sources, as well as multiple “printings” and one theatrical production of the original play.

Dictionaries-

“Deutsches RechtsWörterbuch”. Available online from the University of Heidelberg at:
<http://www.rzuser.uni-heidelberg.de/~cd2/drw/frameset.htm>

“The New English-German Dictionary”. Available online at:
<http://www.iee.et.tu-dresden.de/cgi-bin/cgiwrap/wernerr/search.sh>

Sonnleitner, Joseph. Mundart der Österreicher. Wien, 1811. (Austrian slang dictionary).
Available online from Sagen.at at:
<http://www.sagen.at/doku/lexika/mundart1811/mundart1811.html>

Webster’s New World German Dictionary: German/English, English/German. Webster; 1992.

The play-

Der Bauer als Millionär. Directed by Franz Xavier Kroetz. Bayerisches Staatsschauspiel, 2004.

Raimund, Ferdinand. *Das Mädchen aus der Feenwelt oder Der Bauer als Millionär*. Projekt Gutenberg-DE. Available online from Der Spiegel at:
<http://gutenberg.spiegel.de/raimund/millionr/millionr.htm>.

Raimund, Ferdinand. *Der Bauer als Millionär*. Reclam; Stuttgart, 2003.

FUTURE OPTIONS

As part of my work on this project, I researched professional possibilities for my finished play. I feel as if the draft constituting my Honors Thesis Project is not quite ready for professional submission yet and plan to develop further drafts before I do anything further with my work. However, I have already researched the steps I plan to take once I am satisfied that I have a product of quality.

The first step will be to have my work officially copyrighted. Copyright registration is a relatively simple process. I simply send a copy of my script along with the application form and \$30 fee to the Copyright Office at the Library of Congress. Detailed information about the copyrighting process and intricacies of copyright law are available online at www.copyright.gov.

In addition, I will submit my play to American Theatre companies for possible production. The best professional resource by far is the Dramatists Sourcebook. This book is a guide for theatrical writers, translators, adaptors, composers, and songwriters, providing detailed information relating to the profession and submission information for major companies throughout the country. The "Resources" section includes timetables for annual submission deadlines as well as company listings based on thematic specializations.

Dramatists Sourcebook-23rd Edition. Theatre Communications Group; New York, 2004.

ABSTRACT

In 1826 audiences in Vienna were entertained by the premiere of native-son Ferdinand Raimund's *Der Bauer als Millionär* (The Millionaire Farmer). Raimund, a playwright, director, and actor (who played the title role in the original performance), enjoyed relative success during his lifetime, both in his native Austria and what is today Germany. Deeply immersed in the world of Romanticism, Raimund's works are grand in scale yet simple in essence. They feature extravagant spectacle, merry music, and all the magic, fairies, and ghosts one could possibly ever wish for.

In 2004 I came across *Der Bauer als Millionär* during a German language study-abroad program in Munich. While many conventions of Raimund's original are no longer as effective as they were in his time, I discovered that the humor and heart of the piece have retained their appeal. I could easily imagine modern American audiences enjoying it as much as I did. That's when the idea struck me. I had been looking for a project I could undertake for my Honors Thesis requirement, and was hoping to find something that would well fit the second German study-abroad program I was going to be participating in during the following school year. After conducting some informal research and finding that no English-language version of this play had ever been produced, I knew what I would do.

By translating and adapting Raimund's original work I had not only discovered a way to combine the skills and experiences I have developed through my two majors-German and Theatre, but also to introduce an entirely new audience to a classic and truly entertaining play. While I have made some changes, I have striven to always remain true to the spirit of the original. I hope that through my efforts many people who otherwise would never have heard of Ferdinand Raimund's *Der Bauer als Millionär* will come to be enchanted by *The Millionaire Farmer*.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

-I would like to thank Dr. Michael O'Hara for being my official advisor on this project and unofficial advisor on life.

-I would like to thank Letitia Guillaud and Tim Lueke for their support and unofficial advice over the long months as I developed this project.

-I would like to thank everyone who volunteered his or her time and energy to participate in the Reading of the play. I deeply appreciate your help.

-I would like to thank Thomas Sauer for introducing me to this wonderful play and for fostering my interest in it.

Ferdinand Raimund's

The Millionaire Farmer

Translated from the German/Adapted by

Bradley J. Gunter

CHARACTERS

THE PLAYERS

Narrator
Fairy
Tightrope Walker
Company Member
Queen
Actor Greed
Actor Wurzel

THE FAIRIES AND OTHER MAGICAL FIGURES

Lakrimosa
Ajax
Boisterous
Youth
Age
Cupid
Night
Hymen

Contentment
Greed
Hate

THE MORTALS

Wurzel
Anna
Karl
Laurence
Heather

Nigel
Festler

THE AUDIENCE MEMBERS

Audience Member 2
Audience Member 1

I, i

NARRATOR

Eighteen long years, the time now past,
Our tragic tale occurred hast.
The fairy grand, both young and fair,
Strolled in the warm July air.

enter the Fairy

FAIRY

I rode a sunbeam from the sky,
A glimpse of this great day to spy.
I feel so happy I could die,
So youthful and content am I.

enter the Tightrope Walker and the Company Member. Throughout the rest of the verse, the scenes are acted out.

NARRATOR

Just then she came to a valley,
Where a caravan did dally.
Tightrope walkers on a sojourn,
Whose director made her heart burn.

FAIRY

Oh that man there, so young and blonde,
So brief a glance, and yet so fond.
A wonder of man, so sincere,
I have to have him now and here.

COMPANY MEMBER

We will not go another step,
While you have not your promise kept.
200 gold, you owe us yet,
Or further work you will not get.

FAIRY

Through his eyes, his heart I can sense,
So his troupe I shall recompense.
A bag of gold come to his side,
And I will make myself his bride.

the Tightrope Walker notices the money, and pays the Company Member, the Fairy rushes off the other side.

NARRATOR

The fairy returned to her abode,
To her servants her scheme she told.
Leaving her affairs in their hands,
Disguised, she rushed to her plans.

FAIRY

An actress am I who treads the stage,
But today I turn a new page.
I have one wish for this my life,
Take me forever as your wife.

TIGHTROPE WALKER

Okay.

During the next verse, the Tightrope Walker performs a routine, falling to his death.

NARRATOR

And so throughout the next two years,
Had this pair a love without peers.
Until one day, he did totter,
Leaving her to raise their daughter.

Brave and strong, the fairy endured,
To her estate she soon returned.
Bringing her child to riches there,
She made herself the following swear;

FAIRY

For you my darling, I will vow,
To all the Heavens, here and now,
For husband shall you ne'er have one,
Lesser than the Fairy Queen's Son.

NARRATOR

No sooner were these words spoken,
would happiness evermore be broken.
A puff of smoke, grey could be seen,
And before them stood the Fairy Queen.

The Queen enters.

QUEEN

How dare you make such wild claims,
This girl you spoil with these aims.
For my son, is she unworthy,
She's not pure fairy, she's half Earthy!

Therefore henceforth she will be cursed,
In poverty she'll be immersed.
And you may not again see her,
Until she weds a poor farmer.

No riches can this youth possess,
But be the man she loves the best.
Also the first love of her life,
When he takes her to be his wife.

Should this pass, fore her eighteenth year,
Then may she be returned here.
But if she fail in this her chore,
To you she's lost... forevermore!

The queen exits.

NARRATOR

As a beggar, she went to Earth,
And sought a man of humble birth.
She came upon a little hut,
And with the owner a deal she cut.

Actor Wurzel enters.

FAIRY

I am but a beggar woman,
And cannot provide for this, my kin.
Please kind sir, do not deny us,
Raise my daughter good and pious.

Marry her to her first true love,
A poor man whom she grows fond of.
Do this when she is seventeen,
And I will once again be seen.

On that, the far off wedding day,
I promise your kindness to repay,
If these my wishes, you will do,
And to an old beggar be true.

NARRATOR

He agreed to do what she had asked,
And to his promise, to e'er hold fast.
And the name of her savior merc'ful?
The farmer, Fortunatus Wurzel.

The sorrow suddenly filled her heart,
Eyes moved to tears, she did depart.
And what became her child's lot?
To this very day, she knew that not.

The fairy soon had a suitor call,
Whose name and face were known by all.
His love for her was like a need,
That dreadful and that hated Greed.

FAIRY

Be gone, foul Greed, I love thee not.
I do not want your loathsome lot.

ACTOR GREED

Then I shall get revenge for this,
Upon the daughter whom you miss.

NARRATOR

The Greed remained true to measure,
And gave the farmer a great treasure.
A different man has he become,
Through this treasure's gigantic sum.

He since has moved to the city,
And drinks all day, what a pity.
Abuses she he once admired,
And wants her married to a friar.

But a poor fisher has her heart,
And with their marriage they must start.
For morrow at the stroke of midnight,
With eighteen years, goes her birthright.

And now that you have heard our tale,
Our hostess does to you avail,
To help her in her darkest hour,
And save her daughter with your power.

the company takes a bow and the audience cheers loudly

BOISTEROUS

Bravo! What a tragic tale!

AJAX

It really spoke to me.

LAKRIMOSA

I wrote it myself.

BOISTEROUS

It shows!

LAKRIMOSA

So now do you understand why I need your help?

ALL

No.

LAKRIMOSA

Sigh. If my daughter doesn't marry her fisher by midnight tomorrow, I'll never see her again.

ALL

Oh.

BOISTEROUS

Why did you hire those actors instead of just telling us?

LAKRIMOSA

I like the Theatre.

Anyway, the few of you are my only hope- I can't help or use my fairy powers.

BOISTEROUS

But how much can these people do?

AGE

Speak for yourself, sonny.

LAKRIMOSA

Oh, I'm sorry. I just realized I haven't properly introduced all of you to each other.

This is my neighbor Age and his grandson Youth.

YOUTH

Whatever.

LAKRIMOSA

Indeed. Cupid, my Godchild.

CUPID

Hee hee. How lovely to meet all of you.

LAKRIMOSA

My old college roommate, Night.

The lights fade.

NIGHT

Sorry.

LAKRIMOSA

Can somebody find the lights please?

There is a commotion as everybody searches for the lights. Youth pulls out a lighter, finds the switch. The lights come on.

YOUTH

Thank you.

LAKRIMOSA

Oh, I'd forgotten how much fun college was.

Boisterous.

BOISTEROUS

Hello everyone!

AGE

How do you two know each other?

LAKRIMOSA

Well, um... we sort of dated back in high school.

CUPID

Oh sweet love.

BOISTEROUS

It was a very long time ago.

LAKRIMOSA

Not that long.

BOISTEROUS

I was the football captain and she was the prim and proper cheerleader... until prom.

YOUTH

Cool!

AGE

Shut-up, boy.

LAKRIMOSA

And last but not least, my dear uncle Ajax, the magician.

AJAX

I'm very pleased to meet all of you.

LAKRIMOSA

Now that you're all friends, go save my daughter.

BOISTEROUS

Let's go!

AJAX

Wait. We need a plan. Let me go ahead and talk to this farmer, see what kind of a fellow he is. Maybe he'll be reasonable.

Do any of you know the bar just outside of this town called "Seedy Pub?"

YOUTH

(a bit too fast)

No. Never heard of it.

BOISTEROUS

I know it well!

AJAX

Good. We'll meet up there and make the rest of our plans. I'm sure that we can think of some way to use the powers we do have. Don't worry, my dear Lakrimosa. You will see your daughter married and your happiness restored.

He leaves.

BOISTEROUS

To the pub!

ALL

Yeah!

Everyone exits. Lakrimosa calls to them as they go.

LAKRIMOSA

Oh, thank you all so very much. Remember, we only have until midnight tomorrow.

Night, who is behind the rest of the group, turns to her.

NIGHT

We'll take care of everything, dear.

BOISTEROUS

Come, Night!

She exits as the lights fade.

LAKRIMOSA

I never could live with her. Now, where are those candles...?

Curtain.

Laurence enters with Heather

LAURENCE

The wine shipment should get here any minute. When it does, I want you to bring the bottles directly up to the main hall. He's having another one of them parties tonight so don't bother with the cellar, they'll finish them all... again. And do it quickly. And don't make a lot of noise, the Master's reading in the bedroom and wants quiet. Also, take ten bottles and put them off to the side somewhere, I need them to give to... a poor family I know... that... likes to drink.

HEATHER

Very good, Mister Laurence.

She exits

LAURENCE

All that one has to do as the first valet of a house! Nothing but hard work all day long. I didn't have this much to do when I was his rancher, but now we live in the city and I'm his servant, and we're refined. Hah! Last night him and his "good friends" drank and sang until well past three... and so it goes five days out of the week. And then he tries to impress them by acting like he's a scholar and all smart... and they make fun of him, saying he's the cleverest person to ever plow a field and calling him "the great philosopher". And he's so dumb, he doesn't know they're making fun of him. It just encourages him.

He sits in there reading... trying to get smarter. He doesn't even care what it is. He once read a book for an entire day before he realized it was in French... which he doesn't know! He spent three days on a travel book about Siberia.

Then there's the writing! All those essays and poetry and other nonsense... and it's all terrible. And last night he said he wanted to be a professor. A professor! This stupid farmer- it's dreadful. If you're not smart, then keep quiet and people won't know it. Oh well. At least that makes it easier to steal from him. Ten bottles of wine here, a little gold there, and he's too dumb or too drunk to notice.

Oh great, here comes Anna. Blah blah blah Karl. Blah blah blah whine. I'd better keep her from her father.

Anna enters, simply dressed

ANNA

Good morning, my dear Laurence! Is my father up yet?

LAURENCE

Good morning, Madame Anna!

ANNA

Laurence. How many hundreds of times have I begged you not to call me Madame? I am just Anna, a poor country maiden.

LAURENCE

What? You? A poor country maiden? Madame, you are a millionaire.

ANNA

But I don't want to be. My father's wealth has brought nothing but unhappiness to our house. Oh, lovely times, where are you? When my father used to be so good to me, and permitted me daily to see my dear Karl. When sparrows nested under our cheeks and the dandelions bloomed in our hearts. When no false friends abused my father as they do now. Happy days, where have you gone!

LAURENCE

I can't imagine why they wouldn't want to stay.

ANNA

Where are you, you nightingales of the green forest, you whirling larks, you sparkling beetles? But no. That is all past. Nevermore shall I see you again my wild lilies, my clear springs, my sweet berries... and my Karl.

LAURENCE

Here we go.

ANNA

Laurence, I have decided. I will go to my father and tell him to throw away the unhappy gold that has taken such a hold of his heart. Then maybe we can see joy again. I will go this very minute.

She starts for Wurzel's room. Laurence stops her

LAURENCE

Madame Anna, I'm afraid I can't let you do that.

ANNA

Why not?

LAURENCE

Why not? Your father is ill.

ANNA

Ill? My father is ill? Is it serious?

LAURENCE

Oh yes, terribly.

ANNA

Really?

LAURENCE

You don't believe me? You think I just made this up to keep you from seeing your father? That's ridiculous. What do you think of me? I'm hurt at the idea of such a thing.

ANNA

Oh Laurence, I didn't mean anything. I'm just worried about my father. He seemed so healthy yesterday.

LAURENCE

Yes, well, he's very ill today. Absolutely nobody is allowed to see him, under any circumstances. He's lying in bed, unable to get up, or even to eat.

Heather enters with a breakfast tray consisting of a bottle of wine, breads, and a goose

HEATHER

The Master's breakfast.

LAURENCE

Just bring it in.

She brings it into the bedroom

ANNA

I see. You are playing a joke on me. Why won't you let me see my father?

LAURENCE

He forbade it. He says he wants to stay away from you and your endless whining and ingratitude. As far as he's concerned, you aren't his daughter.

ANNA

Is that really true? Now he disowns me, refuses to even see me? Oh Heaven, I have no relatives, no friends, no father anymore. What an unfortunate child am I!

She runs out, weeping

LAURENCE

Yup. Nothing but hard work. Oh well, I'd better go put my new wine with the rest.

He exits. Wurzel shortly enters from his room, reading a book.

WURZEL

... reduce heat, let simmer for 30 minutes, stirring occasionally. Hmm... interesting.

Boy, I love food- and breakfast was delicious. (*pats his stomach*) Ah. There is no greater honor in this life than that of having a good stomach, and mine is kingly indeed. Ruler of two kingdoms- plant and animal. A true tyrant who devours all your enemies. And not corruptible in the least... too much sweetness would only spoil you. Oh, you are marvelous!

I have to be the jolliest fellow in the entire world. I have you, my dear friend (*again patting his stomach*), I have lots of money, I have this large house in the city, I have many friends and many more servants, I have my youth and my health (*he pounds on his chest*), what more could a man want in life? Nothing.

Now where the hell is my valet? Laurence! Laurence!

Laurence enters

LAURENCE

Yes, Master Wurzel?

WURZEL

Why aren't you looking after me?

LAURENCE

I just left. Anna was here and I had to get rid of her.

WURZEL

Good. Don't you dare repeat one word that she said, I don't want to hear about Miss Water-Princess's daily whine. After all I've done for her, this is how she repays me. I buy her a flowing gown and get her invited to all the fine city balls, and what does she do? Sits moping around the house wearing that horrible country smock. I've taken it away when she was sleeping, but she always has another one the next morning.

LAURENCE

She's completely unsuited for high society.

WURZEL

What day is it?

LAURENCE

Friday.

WURZEL

Wonderful! Friday is the fish market, which means that damned country boy is going to come again after he's sold his catches. He sits in front of the house by the rocks, staring up at her window like some dumb monkey. I like watching him during my coffee.

LAURENCE

Why go all the way to the zoo?

WURZEL

Exactly. The last time, he fell back and got stuck between two big stones. It took him 10 minutes to get out. I don't understand that girl at all. I let her take lessons in drawing and embroidery... no use. Instead of making beautiful flowers, vases, and other such things... what does she draw? What does she embroider? Nothing but fish! For my birthday she made me a curtain with a great big herring. I've set my foot down now though. She is going to marry a wealthy friar.

LAURENCE

But why? You're already so rich.

WURZEL

Precisely. And she's going to start acting like a rich man's daughter. As long as I have my fortune, she shall never marry that boy.

LAURENCE

She should be grateful for your endless generosity.

WURZEL

That's right. I've given her everything ever since that fateful day when that strange man dressed entirely in green approached me in my fields, saying he was Greed and offering me that treasure.

LAURENCE

You know, you never told me why he gave it to you.

WURZEL

I'm not even sure myself. He just said that I should move to the city and live well, making sure the girl was brought up wealthy and marrying her to another rich man and not that fisher. Then he warned me that I must never say that my luck was gone, or else everything would disappear and I would have to become a beggar.

LAURENCE

Then never do that.

WURZEL

What do you think I am, stupid?

He pulls a flask out of his pocket and takes a swig.

LAURENCE

Does Your Grace always have to be munching?

WURZEL

Leave me be! This is my medicine.

LAURENCE

Your medicine?

WURZEL

Yes, and it tastes terrible. Every week the doctor gives me a full bottle like this, costing 40 shillings. It forces the head to break up. He says that I should keep at it for some years, and after I've spent a few thousand shillings, my brain will clear and I'll finally see just how dumb I was.

LAURENCE

I hope for your sake that it works.

WURZEL

Thank you. I want you to go to that book dealer in the suburbs today and buy one copy of everything he's gotten since the last time I was there for the library.

LAURENCE

Are you sure you want one of everything?

WURZEL

You're right. Make it two copies- I can afford it.

Laurence exits. Wurzel starts reading again.

Add salt for seasoning...

Now I'm hungry again. It seems like no matter what I'm doing, my mind and stomach always go back to food. I want to eat day in and day out, as if all of life was just one big meal. Ooh, that inspires me...

Life is but a feast that we eat. Our waiter, Happiness, occasionally refills our glasses. Many of us drink too fast and then keep trying to get his attention, hoping for something to make it all easier to swallow.

We start our meal off as children, sipping soft soup, warming ourselves up to what will come. The bread, our youth which crumbles away oh so fragilely. Then comes the main dish... large, savory. Some find it rough, and struggle to chew it down. Some rush through it, and find themselves done too fast. Some get indigestion and are gassy later. Only a fool pushes himself from the table before his plate is clean, for this is the only restaurant open. And few are able to savor every precious bite. Those who make it through the entrée are brought dessert... the sweetness of our golden years. But very few of us fully enjoy it, already too full and tired from our earlier eating. As the very last course, we receive our coffee... black as Death. Finally, our cup is empty and it is time for the check, where we learn what balance we owe the establishment- God.

Damn, I need to find a pen.

He rushes from the room. Anna enters.

ANNA

Oh, father! Even from the next room, your words strike me like daggers. You want nothing to do with me. My sad demeanor is offensive to you; you would rather look into happy eyes.

KARL

(from off)

Anna!

ANNA

Karl! He must have already sold his fish.

Karl rushes in and embraces Anna, followed by Ajax wearing country clothes.

KARL

Anna, oh my dear Anna! At last, I am able to speak with you!

ANNA

Oh Karl! What in Heaven are you doing here?

KARL

I thought you'd be happier to see me, after all this time.

ANNA

Yes, but if my father were to see you...

AJAX

Don't you worry about him.

ANNA

(surprised)

Ahh! Karl, this man-

KARL

Yes, isn't it wonderful!

AJAX

Don't worry about me either.

KARL

Yes. When I see you, my Anna, I forget the entire world. Oh Anna, to see you again. I wouldn't have believed it if you hadn't called on me through this man.

ANNA

Through this man?

KARL

Of course. He came to me in the market and explained how you sent for him to lead me to you when your father was away.

ANNA

But, Karl... I don't know this man.

KARL

What?

AJAX

Of course you don't. That's because we've never met before.

KARL

Sir, are you trying to have fun at our expense?

AJAX

Heavens, no! I prefer having fun at my own expense. I just want to make you two wonderful kids happy. I can't tell you who I am, but trust me- I am an honorable fellow. I promise you that you will be married by the end of the day tomorrow. Just give me a chance to talk to the farmer and he'll come around. By tonight, the whole pie will be in order. Just go home to your hut and wait for me to come by.

ANNA

Can it be possible? Oh Karl, we have to trust him...

WURZEL

(offstage)

Where did you put the damned pens?

ANNA

Heavens! Father is coming. If he sees you, all is lost.

KARL

Then I'll jump out the window.

ANNA

That's the way he's coming. Maybe he'll go somewhere else.

AJAX

Don't worry.

KARL

But he's coming this way.

AJAX

No matter, I'll handle him. In the meantime, you'd better hide in that chest.

Karl tries to open it

KARL

It's locked!

AJAX

Well, then we'll have to open it, won't we?

He pulls out a little magic book and wand, quickly flips through the pages, until he finds what he's looking for.

AJAX

Let's see now... un-localizing, un-locating, ah, here it is... un-locking. Schticketty, Bicketty, Pickety, Pup... Chestity Chest, Open up.

He taps the wand on the chest and it opens up. Karl, amazed, climbs in. Ajax puts his equipment away as Wurzel enters

WURZEL

I don't want to hear anything from you, I just want to find a pen.

He notices Ajax.

Who the hell is this? What are you doing here? Who let you in?
What the hell do you want?

AJAX

I ask only for the honor of speaking with you.

WURZEL

You already have that honor... now out with it.

AJAX

You probably already know me.

WURZEL

You? From where?

AJAX

My name is Martin Herschel. I am the local snail herder.

WURZEL

And I should know you for that? Maybe because you look as dirty as a snail. If you don't get out now, you're going to get to know me well.

AJAX

Oh, I've already heard about this famed temper of yours. My niece wrote about how you've mistreated the fisher, Karl. That's why I traveled down here.

WURZEL

From the snail ranch?

AJAX

On his behalf, I ask for this maiden's hand in marriage. Three years ago, you gave him your word of honor, and now you must keep it.

WURZEL

What the hell is this? First of all, you come here on behalf of your miserable niece... whoever she is. Secondly, you have the nerve to ask for the hand of my daughter... for that good-for-nothing fisher. You've got to be joking with me.

AJAX

I've never been more serious. The boy is a brave youth and an upstanding fellow.

ANNA

That's right father. He doesn't like to make waves.

WURZEL

A fisher- who doesn't like making waves- though he spends all day wading through the water? You be quiet! I've had absolutely enough of you and your foolishness... never obeying me, always fantasizing about the woods, and those farm clothes you keep getting somehow. I'm through! You will obey me and marry the rich old friar. And if you so much as even *eat* fish in front of me again, you will regret it.

ANNA

Oh, what kind of poor fool am I?

WURZEL

The worst kind. Even a poor fool wants to be rich. You want to be with a fisher- this unsure profession? Before he catches a single fish, a hundred swim right by him. You'd be better off marrying one of this guy's snails.

ANNA

Father, don't make me have to go to this extreme. Hear my swear: I despise your wealth and the city and will never, never leave my poor Karl.

WURZEL

You will not leave the fisher?

AJAX

No she won't, and she's right! And you know it. And if you don't give her your blessing, you will surely come to regret it.

WURZEL

Very well, now hear my swear, you noble snails-man: I will not allow this union to take place until my blood becomes as ice, until these strong fists become so feeble that I can no longer strike impudent knaves like you and the boy, until my smoky black hair becomes as white as a glacier, until I am so poor that I am forced to become a beggar in the marketplace. In short, when I am a feeble, broke old man! Then, and only then, my dear snail herder, will I allow that boy to marry my daughter.

AJAX

(quickly, extending his hand)

Then shake on it.

WURZEL

(shaking)

Very well. I will remain true to my word.

There is a loud clap of thunder.

AJAX

Alright, then. Now live well, Lord of Wurzel. Don't forget your swear. Continue mistreating that poor girl there, curse the life of a farmer, keep your drinking buddies. But you will regret when you have to face the snail herder again. Do you understand me? You will definitely regret that day. Remember that well.

He exits. Wurzel waits for a few seconds and then starts off after him, angry.

WURZEL

(exiting)

Wait just a minute you damned snail handler!

Anna sits herself on top of the chest.

ANNA

Oh, how horrible our fate is!

KARL

(knocking on the chest)

Anna! Get off!

ANNA

(getting up)

Stay quiet, I beg you!

KARL

(coming out of the chest)

That I can no longer do. It pounds at me like a hammer, to hear your name so abused by this rogue... and to stay quiet! You should be happy. Farewell, my Anna, and live well...

He starts to leave

ANNA

Karl, if you love me you will not go out that door.

KARL

Then I'll have to jump through the window.

ANNA

To the street? In broad daylight?

KARL

I will stay here no longer. You will see me rich, or you will see me no more.

He jumps.

ANNA

Watch where you fall, Karl!

There is a commotion outside. Anna runs out the door.

The front of the house. Karl has fallen on top of Wurzel. Laurence and Heather are there.

WURZEL

Get off of me! Help, this thief broke into my house. Get the police!

Heather runs out.

KARL

(getting up)

Villain! You would take my good name too?

ANNA

(running in)

Heavens! Karl are you okay? My father!

KARL

(running off)

Farewell, Anna.

ANNA

(falling to Wurzel's feet)

Father, what have you done?

WURZEL

Away!

He flings her away from him and goes into the house, slamming the door behind him. Anna rushes after him.

ANNA

Locked? Father! Father! Forgive me! Listen to me!

WURZEL

(from the window, throwing out a bundle of farm clothes)

Away with you! Take your damned farm clothes and go back to the forest you love so much. You are not my child! Your mother was a beggar woman, you ungrateful thing, you. Off with you to the larks and beetles and other wild things, you forest snipe. You will never more come into my house!

He slams the window shut. Laurence starts to exit.

ANNA

Oh what an unlucky child am I! Laurence! You must help me.

LAURENCE

Yes, well... I would, but I have something else to do... somewhere else... that's not here. And I have to go there now. So... good luck.

He exits. Anna is alone on the stage

ANNA

All that has happened! What will become of me? Is there no being that will take pity on me? Oh that the night might arrive to veil me and my disgrace.

Night enters and there is a lighting change to evening. Anna, who doesn't see her, wanders off in despair.

NIGHT

I can't do much, but I do what I can.

II, i

A small hut in a valley. It is the beginning of the next morning. Anna soon wanders in, tired and disheveled after the previous night.

ANNA

I'm so tired; I just need to rest a minute.

She sits down on the steps of the hut.

What a pleasant valley? I wonder where I am, and why I feel so calm and peaceful all of a sudden. And who's hut is this?

She reads the address of the house.

Contentment, 1 Calm Street, Peace Valley. Contentment? That's strange- father always said that you could only find contentment in the city. I wonder what she's doing here. I know- she must have gotten sick in the city and needs some fresh country air.

She must be a very elegant noble woman. Maybe she needs a servant girl! If I beg her, perhaps she could take me in.

She knocks.

Pardon me, Your Grace. I am but a poor girl who would gladly like to have the honor of maybe-

Contentment answers the door. She is simply dressed.

CONTENTMENT

Yes, my child?

ANNA

(surprised)

Who are you?

CONTENTMENT

Why, I'm the lady of the hut- Contentment. You were looking for me, right?

ANNA

(falling to her knees)

Oh, forgive me Your Grace. I didn't realize it was you.

CONTENTMENT

Oh for- get up, please. You don't have to bow to me.

ANNA

(standing up)

I'm sorry, Your Grace, I was just-

CONTENTMENT

And you don't have to call me "Your Grace". Contentment will do just fine, Anna.

ANNA

How do you know my name?

CONTENTMENT

I know all about you. There are certain advantages to being a living allegory, you know. Although we've never met before, you've been close to me for some time now. And now you've finally found me. There's no need for you to despair any more.

ANNA

I do feel very content all of a sudden.

CONTENTMENT

Of course you do, my dear. That's the way it works. You're with Contentment now. I'm actually somewhat surprised you found your way here.

ANNA

Oh, it wasn't very difficult.

CONTENTMENT

You think so? Many thousands seek me and wander right past, not finding me, for the path that leads to me seldom appears to be the right one.

ANNA

I don't understand.

CONTENTMENT

I know, my dear. It's not important that you know how you found your way into my valley, just that you did.

ANNA

I'm glad I did, Your Grace- I mean, Contentment.

CONTENTMENT

Me too, my child. You should know that the man who disowned you yesterday is not your real father, otherwise he would never have done such a thing.

ANNA

I told myself the same thing. After he locked me out, I was very upset and worried at first. But as the night went on, I started thinking. And I realized that if he is telling the truth, and isn't really my father, then it would explain why he was so cruel to me. And then I didn't feel so bad, even though I was so alone.

CONTENTMENT

But you weren't alone, Anna. You have some very special friends that you don't know yet. As well as a mother, who loves you very deeply and who you will soon be embracing. How does that sound?

ANNA

Wonderful! I never dreamed I would ever have a mother. When can I see her?

CONTENTMENT

Soon enough. In the meantime, you'll stay with me.

ANNA

Oh how can I ever thank you?

CONTENTMENT

Simple. Just do one thing- stay exactly as you are.

ANNA

Really? But not really *exactly* as I am, right?

CONTENTMENT

Exactly.

ANNA

Oh. But... does that mean I can't get married?

CONTENTMENT

You want to get married?

ANNA

Yes, of course. I feel so peaceful in my woods, away from my father's house. And being with you and learning about my mother comforts me beyond anything I could ever imagine. But when I think about my Karl... I feel as if I'm still missing something.

CONTENTMENT

Don't worry, my child. That's called love. It works well with Contentment. Real love doesn't change who you are... it illuminates the best parts.

You and Karl deserve each other and will be together.

ANNA

You know my Karl?

CONTENTMENT

I used to. He was always with me, but since you came along, he hasn't been very content.

ANNA

I'm sorry.

CONTENTMENT

There's no need to be. This world is full of people who are unable to know me. Scarce few have as great a reason as Karl's love for you. Don't worry, though. Your Karl will soon find his way back to the both of us- me through you. Come now, my child. Rest a little while in my hut and we will soon set about to make your dreams come true.

Anna goes excitedly into the hut.

And maybe others will learn from your and Karl's example how they too can find Contentment. Perhaps your union will succeed in reuniting me with the world that I love so very much, but that has pushed me so far away from itself. Then maybe I can also feel content at last.

She goes into the hut.

II, ii

Laurence and Heather are pouring a glass for Wurzel and his friend Festler. The place is a real mess.

FESTLER

And now a toast... to you, my dear "Philosopher", long may you live!

He gulps down his glass and passes out. Heather and Laurence run to check on him.

WURZEL

That was a nice toast. Thank you.

HEATHER

I think he's passed out.

WURZEL

Then take him to one of the guest beds.

HEATHER

They're already full with all your other guests. You have been drinking all night already.

WURZEL

Then put him in that one blue room I never use.

LAURENCE

(to Heather)

There's eight of those.

They carry him out.

WURZEL

Wow. What a party, huh?

That's right, everybody's gone.

Laurence and Heather come back in.

Ah, Laurence- Heather- Come, join me in a glass.

LAURENCE

Gladly.

WURZEL

May all live merrily and drink well. To life!

HEATHER

Cheers.

The clock strikes 8.

WURZEL

I'd say it's about time for some breakfast.

There is a loud pounding at the door.

What's that? Who is it?

They pound again, louder. He speaks to Laurence

Go see who it is.

LAURENCE

(to Heather)

Go see who it is.

Heather exits

WURZEL

Whoever it is has some nerve to be pounding so loudly so early.

Heather re-enters.

Well?

HEATHER

There's a young... gentleman outside. He wants to speak with you.

WURZEL

Well, what's his name?

HEATHER

I'm not sure. He says that he's Youth.

WURZEL

Ah, wonderful. Let him in then... I'm always happy to greet a youth. I really am a lucky man to have all the beautiful and young people coming to visit me. One of you damned good-for-nothings go get the good Champagne.

LAURENCE

You heard him.

Heather goes out the door.

HEATHER

Right this way, sir.

Heather re-enters, followed by Youth, closes the door and then exits to the rest of the House.

YOUTH

Nice pad. How's it goin', bro?

WURZEL

(to Laurence)

How do you like that? As young as a pup and as dumb as an ass. Not five seconds and he's already calling me "brother".

YOUTH

Uh... yeah, I didn't really want to bother you or anything, but I'm supposed to tell you something, bro.

WURZEL

Well, what can I do for you "brother"?

(to Laurence)

He probably wants some money.

YOUTH

Now, stay cool, okay bro? Nothing personal, but I gotta split.

WURZEL

Well, that's not so bad... you just walked in, "brother". Easy come, easy go I guess. I was afraid you wanted something important.

YOUTH

This actually is kind of important. Think abstract, bro. I'm Youth... I'm leaving... We've already been "together" since, like, you were born.

WURZEL

Oh, yes. I remember the doctor and everything. My mother was there too, I think.

YOUTH

Yeah... sarcasm. That's great. Okay, I can play that. We went to school together too, you remember that? We sat together and everything.

WURZEL

That's right! -On the dunce's bench.

YOUTH

Yeah... dunce's bench... probably. Didn't learn much though, huh?

WURZEL

Oh, we wouldn't let them teach us anything.

YOUTH

Obviously. And then we'd get totally wasted, bro... it was "wicked"!

WURZEL

Disgraceful, "brother"! Completely disgraceful!

YOUTH

Yeah, all that incoherent babbling and public urination...

WURZEL

And the beer...

YOUTH

And the wine... you drink that crap like water.

WURZEL

(to Laurence)

Whoever he is, he seems to know me.

(to Youth)

Then let it be so. Come, let's shake and drink to our brotherhood.

YOUTH

First off bro, all you got is wine and punch and I don't want none of that. Secondly, you're completely missin' the boat here. I'm out. I'm gone. I'm like yesterday's news. It was cool, but I got better things to do than hang out with old men.

WURZEL

I'm not an old man.

YOUTH

What are you, like, over 30 or somethin'?

WURZEL

I've always been cool.

YOUTH

You were cool, bro. You gotta be changin' like all the time to keep up with the youth. You gotta dress right, you gotta drink right, you gotta "party" if you know what I'm sayin'.

WURZEL

I drink and "party" almost every night.

YOUTH

You don't even know what I'm talkin' about, do you? Narc. You drink... wine. Young people don't drink wine. And you're not even going to be doing much drinking anymore here.

WURZEL

What are you talking about, not drink? That's my favorite thing to do. Why on earth should I quit? I'm as healthy as an ox! Youth is still very much with me.

YOUTH

Oh hey, there you go. Yeah, "Youth"... with you. Me... leaving. My name's Youth. You catch me yet or still a little slow?

WURZEL

Listen you little bastard-

YOUTH

Whoa, whoa! Okay, that's enough of that. You wanna go there? Huh? I was trying to be nice here, ease you into what's to come. But if that's the way it's gonna be... I'll be right back.

He exits.

WURZEL

Pah!

Heather enters.

HEATHER

The champagne.

WURZEL

Give me that!

Before he can take a drink, there is a feeble knock at the door.

Who's that now? That punk again?

(to Laurence)

Tell whoever it is to go away.

LAURENCE

(to Heather)

You heard him.

Heather goes out and comes back in a few seconds later.

HEATHER

It's him again. He's with a very old man who wants to speak with you.

WURZEL

Who is he?

HEATHER

(calling)

Who are you?

AGE

I'm the great old Age. I want to come in!

WURZEL

Age? Don't let him in... lock the door!

Heather locks the door.

And take this away. Bring me something more... hip.

Heather takes the bottle of champagne and exits confused.

AGE

Are you going to open this door or not?

WURZEL

Never!

AGE

I'm coming in anyway. On the count of three... one... two...

he starts coughing strongly. This continues for a few beats.

YOUTH

You okay?

Eventually, he hacks something up from the back of his throat and spits it out.

Ohhhh... I'm fine, I'm fine. Okay, where was I? Oh yes... three.

The door pops open as if blown by a strong wind. Age enters... very slowly, wearing a nightgown with cap, slippers, and a shawl pulled around his shoulders. He uses a cane. Youth follows him.

YOUTH

That's the guy, gramps.

AGE

That's what's wrong with you damn kids nowadays... no respect for your elders.

YOUTH

Yeah, that's the cause of every problem in the world.

AGE

Shut-up boy.

I've come to stay with you.

WURZEL

Here with me? What do you think this is, a hospice?

YOUTH

You're killin' me, bro. Abstract, abstract.

AGE

I can handle this myself, boy.

That's good- you've got a sharp sense of humor... a hospice! It will be soon. Normally you'd see me coming, but that business with your daughter brought me a bit quicker. Since you don't want her, you get to adopt me.

YOUTH

Abstractly.

AGE

Dammit boy, shut the hell up for just two or three minutes!

So, you get to adopt me... abstractly.

WURZEL

Then I'm sending you away to military academy... abstractly!

AGE

Hee, hee. Oh, you wise-ass, you. Don't worry, I'm not all that bad. We can have lots of fun together. Oh, the things we'll do! We can cook... just nothing spicy, oh dear no. We'll collect things... stamps and coins and boxes. Oh, you simply must see my box collection! Someday they might be worth something, you know. And on Sundays, we can take short strolls in the park and feed all those wonderful ducks. It'll be marvelous! And we can still dance of course... I know how you young people like to dance. Why, just the other day I was doing a wonderful little jig of some sort or other... until I threw out my hip by taking a big step. I just got so overwhelmed with the music and the dancing and all the excitement. I knew I should've been more careful... I'm not an eighty-five year-old any more, you know.

WURZEL

So I see.

AGE

You might as well start to get comfortable with me. We're gonna be together for awhile... at least the rest of your life. So relax.

(to Laurence)

Go bring your master a nice comfy robe.

Laurence starts to go.

WURZEL

Don't you dare, or I'll box your ears!

AGE

Hee, hee. I'm afraid your boxing days are over now.

He lays his hand on Wurzel's head. Wurzel's hair changes to white and he crumples himself into a chair.

WURZEL

Laurence... I want my robe.

Laurence runs off to get it. He comes back in and helps put in on Wurzel during the next couple lines.

AGE

Hee, hee. Don't feel like hitting anybody now, do you?

WURZEL

No.

AGE

You feel like sleeping, don't you?

WURZEL

Yes.

AGE

Well, then I should leave you to get some rest. We may be together for many, many years, but you have to take very good care of yourself.

WURZEL

Okay... I don't want to get sick or anything.

AGE

You shouldn't worry so much, it causes wrinkles. Heh, heh. You get it? It causes wrinkles! Heh, heh, heh, heh...

Wurzel meekly starts laughing along with him. Age starts coughing heavily again. Laurence tries helping by hitting him on the back. Youth motions that he should let him be. Eventually he coughs out his teeth and composes himself.

Oh, not again. Just a second...

He very carefully and unsuccessfully tries to bend over to pick up his teeth. Youth just watches, amused. Eventually, Laurence, disgusted, helps him. Age then takes a second to put them back in his mouth.

That's better. Now you make sure to sleep at least twelve hours every night. Always keep yourself warm, drink lots of water, and never go too far from a bathroom. In fact, you might want to start with a bedpan now, before it's too late.

YOUTH

Yeah, don't make the same mistake he did.

AGE

What did I tell you?

YOUTH

It's been more than three minutes.

AGE

That's it. Get your ass back in the wagon- we're going home.

He grabs him by the ear and very slowly starts to walk out. At the door, he turns back.

Oh, and I wouldn't eat anything solid more than once or twice a week. Adieu! But don't be sad... I'll be here with you. Heh, heh.

YOUTH

Abstractly.

Age drags him out.

WURZEL

What has happened to me?

Heather enters with a glass.

HEATHER

I just mixed a bunch of stuff together here for... Oh my God!

WURZEL

Is it so bad? Laurence, bring me a mirror.

Laurence just turns to look at Heather, who goes.

Oh, I can't bear it. I have to fight this.

He tries to get up, but it hurts too much.

I can't... it hurts too much!

Heather comes back with the mirror. He looks into it.

Look at me... I'm hideous. And my beautiful hair...

LAURENCE

Oh, it's not that bad now.

WURZEL

No?

LAURENCE

At least you finally look like a real “professor”.

WURZEL

You’re making fun of me.

LAURENCE

No... it just makes me feel... greedy that you have white hair and I don’t.

WURZEL

Greed? Did you say Greed? This is all his fault. His money brought this upon me and now he leaves me to suffer. What good is my fortune now that I can no longer enjoy it? I’d just as well burn it.

LAURENCE

Now calm down, Your Grace. You told me what would happen if you cursed your riches.

WURZEL

Let it happen... I don’t want to have it anymore. I’ve lost my youth and my beauty... what good is my money? I’d rather be poor and healthy than to ever have gotten that damned treasure. You hear me, you damned Greed? Take your money, I don’t want it! Oh, if only I could go back to the way I once was.

There is a loud clasp of thunder. The house transforms itself into a farm. There is livestock that makes braying sounds.

LAURENCE

You stupid idiot! There you have it now.

WURZEL

Oh, do you hear that? All my babies are whining for me!

LAURENCE

(whining)

They’re not the only ones! How could you?

WURZEL

Be polite in front of the animals! Don’t you have any feelings? How can you be so ungrateful?

LAURENCE

I'm sorry, what was that? Did you just order me to do something? Okay... oh, wait... you just lost all your money. Now it's my turn. You have nothing, you stupid farmer! Look what's become of your riches and your palace? All that's left is a dilapidated hut and some stupid animals. Everything's gone. Everything you had and everything I had... all gone. Poof. Here I am with nothing. A head servant who worked so very hard every single day for this, this farmer who has now ruined me. Everything I stole... gone!

WURZEL

What? You no-good thief!

LAURENCE

You listen to me good, you thick-headed, ugly, poor old-man. If I ever so much as see you again, I will slowly break every single bone in your body and feed you to a pack of wolves.

He exits.

WURZEL

Good riddance. We don't need him... or money, do we Heather?

HEATHER

Uhhh... well... good bye.

Heather runs out.

WURZEL

Oh! Is there anybody else to abuse me?

Greed, dressed in green, and Hate, dressed in red, appear.

GREED

Yeah... Me! You stupid, stupid farmer! What have you done? Why the hell didn't you marry off that girl long ago like I told you too? Meet my brother, Hate.

HATE

Hello.

GREED

If you don't leave my sight immediately, he's going to put a snake in your head that will eat out your brain, driving you crazy before it kills you.

WURZEL

Go ahead! Look what you've already done to me, you, you green freak you!

Greed and Hate erupt with laughter.

That's right, laugh. You have every right to.... I'm the fool who trusted you. Now I've lost everything. I've gone from being a young ass... to an old one.

He stumbles out as Greed and Hate continue laughing at him.

GREED

Oh... brother, I beg you... please torment him for the rest of his days.

HATE

Don't you worry, brother... for he who stands against Greed, also finds an enemy of Hate.

GREED

Wonderful. But what should I do now? Lakrimosa is going to triumph and get her daughter back because of him. I can't stand it... and after she turned me down. I mean, who wouldn't want me?

HATE

You're Greed.

GREED

I know! It's unfair... I wanted to win. I hate that!

HATE

Hey.

GREED

Sorry. We were so close- and now it may be too late. If only there was something we could do...

HATE

I've got it!

GREED

What?

HATE

You know that small island estate I have not far from here?

GREED

The one where we had the picnic?

HATE

Yes. In the garden is my enchanted nine-pin bowling alley.

GREED

Nine pins?

HATE

Yes. That's where I keep a ring of vast magic. The bearer of this ring can create gold out of thin air. Now, the only way to receive this ring, is by bowling at this enchanted alley.

GREED

With nine pins?

HATE

Yes. If one bowls and knocks over all nine pins with one roll, he wins the ring and all the wealth and power that come with it. But if one fails to knock all nine over, he is immediately struck down... dead. Now...

GREED

But why?

HATE

Why what?

GREED

Why nine pins?

HATE

That's just the way it works. Anyway, he has this power as long as he keeps the ring on his finger. The second he removes it, he loses his power and all his wealth forever.

GREED

How does it work?

HATE

I just said how it works.

GREED

No, the nine pin bowling.

HATE

Like regular bowling.

GREED

But how do you arrange the pins?

HATE

They make like a diamond shape... with one in the front, and then two, and then three, and then two, and then one.

GREED

Which makes nine.

HATE

Yes. So I will send a magic parrot or something to lead the fisher to my island with the promise of money. Since he wants the girl and thinks he has to be rich, he'll follow and agree to bowl. If he knocks them all down-

GREED

All nine.

HATE

All nine- then he gets the ring which will make him rich. If he fails to knock ALL NINE down, he will be dead. Either way, we win.

GREED

But if he wins, he can still marry the girl.

HATE

That isn't important. Lakrimosa's daughter has to marry her *poor* fisher by midnight. If he gets the ring and they marry, it won't matter.

GREED

Wait, but what if he takes the ring off before they get married?

HATE

That will never happen. Once he has unlimited power and wealth, he won't give it up... that's the power of Greed and Hate. All we have to do now is lure him to the bowling alley.

GREED

With nine pins.

HATE

Would you drop that already?

GREED

Sorry.

HATE

So does my plan please you?

GREED

Isn't there something simpler we could do? It all seems rather complicated and Romantic.

HATE

I know that, but it's just kind of the way I work. We are personifications, you know. Can you think of anything better?

GREED

No I can't. And I'm greedy that you're the one who thought of this.

HATE

Oh, I hate it when you flatter me like that. Come, let's set the plan into motion. I promise that you will get your revenge tonight brother.

They exit.

II, iii

The nine pin bowling lane. Nigel, the attendant, is at a small counter. Around the lane are memorial markers to unsuccessful bowlers; "David Lee, struck only tree", "Phillip Tate, all of eight", "Joseph Moore, moved four", "Michael Cutter, rolled a gutter", and "Robert Orange, didn't do very well." Nigel is writing in a journal.

NIGEL

Dear Journal-

The unending blackness of my existence continues. Another day of waiting... and waiting... and waiting. But nothing comes. No release from my suffering.

I think back now and then on that cursed day when I answered the help wanted ad. Attendant and book-keeper sought for position at enchanted nine pin bowling alley hidden in the garden of a mysterious island- excellent benefits, paid vacation. It sounded so exotic and exciting. Surely I'd meet interesting people, get inspiration for my writing. But no. Only a few people have ever come, and they're all as dead as I feel in my heart. I tell them they'll die. They don't care. They want the ring and don't listen. Nobody listens.

The only creative fulfillment I get anymore is in writing their memorials, and those are only seen by the next customers... right before they die. I dream of that glorious day when somebody knocks them all down. Perhaps that will alleviate the overwhelming blackness that I feel.

Karl wanders in, somewhat confused.

KARL

Where am I?

NIGEL

Another customer. Oh joy.

Greetings. Welcome to the enchanted nine pin bowling alley. My name is Nigel, I'll be your attendant today.

He pulls out a big registry book from behind his desk.

How did the gentleman hear about our alley, if I may ask?

KARL

A parrot let me here. He promised me wealth so I could marry my Anna. Then he just flew away. Am I going crazy?

NIGEL

That's really not for me to say... after all who can judge another's sanity? But this parrot did well-inform the gentleman.

KARL

So there are riches here?

NIGEL

In a manner of speaking. He who knocks down all nine pins would become a millionaire.

KARL

Really? Then I could marry my Anna! Quick, give me the ball.

NIGEL

If the gentleman would wait just a moment- there is some business to discuss first. If the gentleman would read the rules- here.

KARL

He who should bowl all the pins
Receives the ring of wealth.
He who fails in his attempt
Loses all of his health.

NIGEL

I wrote that. It means that the gentleman is released from the suffering of this mortal coil... Basically, you die if you miss, but should you win, you'd get a ring which allows you to create gold... and so on. It comes with a manual. So, does the gentleman still want to bowl?

KARL

What use is living without my Anna? I've gotten strikes before...
Give me the ball!

NIGEL

Of course. Is the gentleman sure that he wouldn't like to further discuss the nature of his existence before its end?

KARL

Positive. I'm ready now.

NIGEL

I understand. Sign here please...

Karl signs in the book.

and that'll be two shillings for the shoe rental.

KARL

Shoe rental?

NIGEL

Well the gentleman doesn't expect us to let him bowl in his regular shoes, does he? Only bowling shoes are allowed on the alley.

KARL

But I don't have two shillings! I'll pay you after I bowl.

NIGEL

Of course the gentleman will. Who am I deny another's sweet release over a mere two schillings. Here.

He hands him a pair of shoes, which he puts on, as well as a ball. Karl stands at the line and gets himself ready.

I wish the gentleman luck.

KARL

Anna will be mine!

He bowls and knocks down all nine. Lights blink and some sort of brief fanfare is played.

NIGEL

Well, what do you know? All nine. How exciting. I believe this belongs to the gentleman. Congratulations.

He pulls a ring and small book out of his pocket which he hands to Karl before returning to his post and his journal. Karl looks at the ring a moment and puts it on his hand. He holds it up in triumph.

KARL

The ring is mine!

NIGEL

Good for you. Addendum- I was wrong. The darkness ensues.

Curtain.

III, i

The front of a great palace. Karl enters followed by Hate and Greed.

KARL

Is the house completed yet?

GREED

Almost.

KARL

Hurry. I want everything ready when I return. My Anna will have the grandest wedding gold can purchase.

HATE

Of course. Good luck, sir.

KARL

Just make sure everything's in order.

He exits. After a second, Hate and Greed start laughing.

HATE

Oh, bravo! Bravo! Isn't that marvelous? Do you see how quickly he has fallen under the power of my ring?

GREED

And how he orders us around? He's more than a bit confused. The fool must think we came to work for him like all the other gold-hungry members of the town.

HATE

No matter. As long as it allows us to keep an eye on him, we can play along with his delusions. All the better to guarantee your revenge comes to pass.

GREED

Brilliant, brother.

HATE

Thank you, brother. I only wonder where the fairy and her friends are?

GREED

Maybe they've realized their plan is futile and gave up.

HATE

Let's not get cocky yet. What time is it?

GREED

Six o'clock.

HATE

Only six more hours. Who knows? Maybe he'll actually find the girl. I might as well prepare the servants for a *grand* wedding. Make sure nobody interferes.

He exits. Greed goes off to search the grounds. After a few seconds, Anna, Contentment, and Cupid creep in quietly, disguised as farm girls and boy.

CUPID

This is the place. Isn't that palace simply lovely?

CONTENTMENT

Where's this magician we're supposed to meet?

CUPID

He must be here somewhere. Maybe he's hiding. I'd be glad to go look for him. Wait here a moment.

He runs off.

ANNA

Heavens, how is this going to end? I know this was where my Karl lived, but what's this palace? And where's his hut? Where is my dear Karl? What could have become of his noble soul?

CONTENTMENT

Shh! You've got to stay calm, my child. We don't want somebody to find us. Cupid here is a friend of your mother. He told me that the magician never picked up Karl for some reason and now he's fallen under the power of Hate. Your benefactors aren't strong enough to confront him, but they promised they'd find Ajax and he would meet us here. Where on earth is he?

ANNA

My Karl, under the power of Hate. Oh cruelest fate! How could this happen?

CONTENTMENT

He probably doesn't understand the situation completely. It's easy to find yourself with Hate if you don't think about it. I'm sure that everything would be okay if I could only speak with Karl. Why don't I have any magical powers? Wait, someone's coming. It's Greed! This could be trouble. Play along, Anna.

Greed comes back in, making his rounds. He doesn't recognize the women.

Excuse me. Is the master of the house available?

GREED

No.

CONTENTMENT

Could I ask where he is?

GREED

He's fetching his future wife. They're getting married tonight.

ANNA

Good Heavens!

GREED

You look familiar to me. Have we met?

CONTENTMENT

Oh, I highly doubt it. We're just poor, simple country maidens from another village.

GREED

I see. I think I should get my colleague. Stay here a minute.

He exits.

ANNA

(to Contentment)

His wife? Surely he's already forgotten me and is marrying some king's daughter. Oh, the happy times are forever lost-

CONTENTMENT

(to Anna)

Would you please relax for a few minutes? You'll give us away.

Greed comes back with Hate.

Be very careful, that's Hate himself.

HATE

What's going on here?

GREED

These girls seem suspicious to me.

HATE

What the hell do you want?

ANNA

We-

(to Contentment)

What do we want?

CONTENTMENT

Please forgive us. We are two poor, distant relatives of the master. We've traveled to see him, without knowing anything about his fortune of course.

HATE

It's a trick! Call the guards!

ANNA

Oh dear Heavens, who can help us now?

Cupid runs out, and shoots an arrow right into the heart of Hate, then runs out the other side shouting back...

CUPID

I got him! Hee, hee, hee.

GREED

Who are you? Come back here.

He runs after Cupid.

HATE

Oh, I feel so strange. Well hello there my dear lovely maiden.

He takes Contentment's hand and kisses it tenderly.

I feel I was too rash before. How may I serve you, my dear?

(to himself)

What the hell was that?

CONTENTMENT

If you could just be so kind as to allow us a little place in the palace where we could wait for the master to return.

ANNA

We beg you very nicely!

HATE

Oh, there is no need to beg. I'd be happy to do anything for a beautiful young woman such as yourself.

(to himself)

I don't quite feel myself right now.

CONTENTMENT

Well, that's very generous of you. Could you maybe show us the way?

HATE

Madam, I would be delighted to, if it only allowed me another second to be in your sweet presence or the possibility of glancing just one radiant smile from that lovely face.

(to himself)

This is crazy! I'm supposed to be Hate, but just being near this wonderful creature is making me feel... happy. If she were to gaze at me with those shining eyes just seven times in a day, I could fill my week with seven hundred beautiful moments. I want to sing. This is embarrassing!

(to Contentment)

Right this way, my dearest buttercup.

He starts out, whistling. Anna and Contentment stay behind a bit.

ANNA

What was-

CONTENTMENT

Just come!

She grabs Anna by the hand and leads her out after Hate.

There is a short pause. Some time passes.

Ajax enters, very carefully. He is sneaking around on tiptoes and very nervous. He checks everything out very cautiously.

GREED

Halt, you!

When he hears this, Ajax stops, very afraid.

AJAX

Ahhh!

He goes quickly into the house. After he is in, Cupid runs onto the stage and hides himself. Greed enters shortly thereafter, looking for him.

GREED

Where did you go?

He goes off the opposite side. Cupid jumps out from his hiding place and runs back out the way they came in, laughing. A few seconds later, Greed runs back across the stage after him.

There you are. Come back here!

There is another short pause. Some more time passes.

Wurzel stumbles in as a beggar. He carries a large pack and walks with a cane. He looks much more pathetic and desperate than he did earlier.

WURZEL

A beggar! Ow, I am sore.

He collapses down.

How miserable I have become. A beggar! Hello? A beggar is here!

Contentment comes in.

CONTENTMENT

Who is making that dreadful noise?

WURZEL

I am, madam. My name is Fortunatus Wurzel. I am a poor beggar who is looking for a bit of food and who has a horrible tale of warning for any who would listen.

CONTENTMENT

Are you really the once so happy farmer? I didn't recognize you.

WURZEL

I am a very different man than I once was.

CONTENTMENT

You poor fool!

WURZEL

That's right. That's exactly right. Poor I am, and a fool I was! Yes, everything is past for me. Might I ask who I have the pleasure of speaking with now?

CONTENTMENT

I'm.... the cook.

WURZEL

Well my dear cook, I should have soon reached forty, but time laid its hands upon me and brought me to the measure of a hundred. Oh, why didn't I just stay a farmer like I was meant to be... I was happy in my fields. Now the fisher is making the same mistakes.

CONTENTMENT

Do you know him?

WURZEL

Of course I know him. He wanted to be my son-in-law. If I had only let him! Many thousands of times have I already regretted that.

CONTENTMENT

Do you mean that?

WURZEL

Oh my dear cook, if you only knew my horrible story, then you couldn't ask such a foolish question.

CONTENTMENT

I'm familiar with your story. I believe it's called fate.

WURZEL

It's true... I brought it on myself.

CONTENTMENT

Are you sorry for what you've done?

WURZEL

With all of my heart.

CONTENTMENT

Are you envious of the fisher's wealth?

WURZEL

Never! I know how he came by it. Somehow the lying Greed and his dreadful brother Hate got to him. They'll corrupt him as surely as they corrupted me.

CONTENTMENT

Would you allow him to marry your step-daughter now?

WURZEL

Not for any price! I've lost her... but even if she were here, I would never allow her to be so unhappy as to have such riches.

CONTENTMENT

What if he was like he was before- just a fisher?

WURZEL

Then I would gladly give her to him... if only he could find her.

CONTENTMENT

He will find her. And if his love is true, then they will be together and everyone will be happy again- including you.

WURZEL

If only that were possible! I've had enough suffering, but what do you know? Do you perhaps have some scraps?

CONTENTMENT

I don't think I'd be able to get any for you. But I can offer you something better... hope. I want you to trust me when I tell you that your happiness will return before the end of the evening. Walk once around the entire town and then return here. When you do, all will be well... on that I give you my word.

WURZEL

You're not a cook, are you?

CONTENTMENT

(laughing)

No, I am no cook.

WURZEL

What are you then?

CONTENTMENT

You will learn that later, but now you must follow my instructions.

WURZEL

Gladly. I suddenly feel very different... almost content.

CONTENTMENT

Be well, my dear Wurzel. We shall soon meet again.

She goes back into the house.

WURZEL

I almost believe that she can do what she promises. I will return as fast as I possibly can.

He exits.

III, ii

A room inside the palace with a window and an alcove. There is also a stove. Contentment enters.

CONTENTMENT

Where on earth did Cupid disappear to? It's already 10:00. And that magician never showed up. If I wasn't Contentment, I would be really worried.

Ajax peeks his head out of the little door of the oven.

AJAX

Psst! Pardon me, did you say you were Contentment?

CONTENTMENT

Yes.

AJAX

Oh, wonderful...

He stands up and walks to her. He is wearing the oven as a suit.

I used a spell to hide in this oven. I've been sitting there for hours. Thank God you've come at last!

CONTENTMENT

Yes, finally! Now who are you?

AJAX

Right! I must have forgotten to introduce myself just now. I am the magician Ajax, Lakrimosa's uncle who was supposed to meet you here. I have important information to tell you.

CONTENTMENT

Good, but talk fast.

AJAX

Oh, of course. I'd hate to waste our time, as precious as it is to us at this late hour. Karl was given a magic ring by Greed and Hate that allows him to create gold out of thin air. If he takes it off, he will lose all his wealth and return to what he was before. So we need to get him to take it off.

CONTENTMENT

Of course.

AJAX

The courageous Boisterous was going to try and talk to Karl while he was in town and away from Hate. I don't know what the other fairies are doing.

CONTENTMENT

How will I know who this Boisterous is when I see him?

AJAX

You'll know when you hear him, trust me on that.

CONTENTMENT

Where were you all day?

AJAX

Oh. Well... I went to the pub to meet with the others and had a few drinks. Then I headed off to meet the fisher and fell asleep.

CONTENTMENT

And what are you doing in that oven?

AJAX

I thought a guard was after me. I wanted to hide a few minutes, but I was too afraid to come out again. I figured you would pass by eventually.

CONTENTMENT

But what if I hadn't just come by?

AJAX

Then, I suppose, I would have been hiding in this oven for a long time.

GREED

(from offstage)

You'd better have everything ready. Your master's back.

CONTENTMENT

He's coming. You should go and find the fairies.

AJAX

Yes, but somebody could catch me.

CONTENTMENT

Then make yourself invisible. You can do that right?

AJAX

I wish! I'm not a ghost- I'm only a magician. I know, I'll disguise myself. But how?

Pause.

Why can't I think of anything? Oh, if only I had finished the advanced disguise for magicians course!

CONTENTMENT

How about an oven?

AJAX

Wonderful idea! Then I could walk right out and they'd never suspect a thing. Now, as soon as I look up the spell, I'll be ready...

He takes some time to pull out his book.

Now what was I doing again.

CONTENTMENT

You had just transformed yourself into an oven.

AJAX

(examining himself)

You're right. Okay, now I'll go to the fairies. Good luck.

He crouches back into oven position and walks out. Anna runs in.

ANNA

He's coming! He's coming!

She looks out the window.

It's him! Karl! Oh Karl!

Contentment pulls her away.

CONTENTMENT

You're ruining everything. Come, follow me- and be quiet!

She pulls her into hiding in the alcove. Karl enters, dressed very elegantly followed shortly by Hate.

HATE

Everything is prepared as you requested.

KARL

Quiet, I tell you! I want to know who those girls were I saw in the window here. Why did they flee? Speak!

HATE

Your Grace, pardon- they said they were relatives...

KARL

Call them- I want to see them.

HATE

Good. I'll get the servants.

KARL

No! Do it yourself- and quickly.

HATE

Yes. Well, only permit me first to just once more remind you what will happen if you remove the ring...

KARL

I know. Don't worry about it- the ring makes me clever. Now get those girls- and don't come back without them!

HATE

I'll bring them.

(to himself)

I think I've had about enough of this fisher.

He exits. Karl believes himself to be alone.

KARL

I feel so confused. I spend the whole day looking for my Anna. Her father's house was completely gone. Then this strange man runs up to me in town, grabbing me and shouting something about Anna waiting for me at home. Then I rush back here and there's a girl in the window. I'm sure it was her. Anna is here.

Contentment and Anna come out of hiding.

CONTENTMENT

Yes she is.

KARL
(rushing to embrace her)

Anna!

ANNA
(doing the same)

Karl!

CONTENTMENT
(stepping between the two)

Stop!

KARL
What's this?

CONTENTMENT
Karl, only I can grant you permission to marry your Anna. The farmer is not her father, but I am the authorized representative of her mother. You two may marry as soon as you renounce your wealth.

KARL
What? Renounce my wealth? I only just got it. I'd just be a poor fisher again- how could I make her happy?

CONTENTMENT
Your fortune will never make her happy. It will forever be tainted by Greed and Hate.

KARL
You lie! I attained my fortune through great peril to my life. You want to take it from me- away!

ANNA
No Karl, she means it-

KARL
Don't believe it. How could she involve you in this? Anna, if you love me, then come with me right now. Everything is prepared for our wedding. Look at me. We've suffered for years and finally everything is set- we can be together! Are you going to leave me because this woman says so?

ANNA
No, I can't! I couldn't ever! Forgive me Contentment, but my Karl is the dearest thing in the world to me, I could never desert him.

CONTENTMENT

You'd be going to your unhappiness, Anna.

ANNA

Nothing about my Karl could ever make me unhappy.

She goes towards him. At that moment Boisterous runs in with a large rifle.

BOISTEROUS

I'm here! Where's Hate and Greed? Let me at them!

KARL

It's him again!

BOISTEROUS

The fisher! See, I told you everything would be all right.

CONTENTMENT

Boisterous, I presume?

BOISTEROUS

That I am!

CONTENTMENT

He hasn't given up his wealth yet.

BOISTEROUS

What?

He points the gun at Karl.

Now you listen to me... what's dearer to you, gold or girl?

KARL

I want both.

BOISTEROUS

I'm sure you do- I would too. But you can only have one.

CONTENTMENT

Just give me the ring you're wearing and I will guarantee your happiness.

KARL

Ha! Now I see your trick. You want my precious ring for yourself. Never! I have both my ring and my Anna and you won't make me surrender either.

CONTENTMENT

Karl, listen-

KARL

No! I've heard enough of your lies. Leave immediately or I'll call my guards.

BOISTEROUS

Bring them on!

CONTENTMENT

You will not give up the ring for her?

KARL

No!

Contentment is suddenly struck by an idea.

CONTENTMENT

Boisterous, could I have your magic wand please?

BOISTEROUS

Okay.

He pulls out his wand and hands it to her. She waves it and taps it on Anna's heart.

CONTENTMENT

Then you may take her.

KARL

Come, Anna.

She starts to go to him but suddenly stops.

ANNA

No. No I won't.

KARL

What? Are you talking crazy?

He goes to her, but she backs away.

ANNA

Go away. I don't want to be near you!

KARL

Anna, what are you saying?

ANNA

I can't stand to look at you with that ring!

KARL

What have you done? You've put some kind of spell on her.

CONTENTMENT

Sort of. I can't enchant anyone, but I do have a few tricks. All I did was remove the blinders that she had placed on her heart for you. Now her love is illuminating the truth. She understands what your wealth and that ring have done to you.

KARL

Undo it!

CONTENTMENT

It can't be undone. For as long as she lives, she will be able to recognize Greed and Hate in all of their forms and always avoid them. She knows what brings true happiness. As long as you have that ring, she can never love you.

Hate and Greed run in.

HATE

What the hell's going on here? Leave him at once or I'll destroy you! Don't you know Hate?

CONTENTMENT

No. I am Contentment.

HATE

Oh it's you, my beautiful maiden. A thousand pardons for being so harsh. Please carry on.

GREED

What is wrong with you today?

HATE

I don't know.

GREED

Well, that's it. I've let you handle things for too long now. It's time for me to take charge. Behold the awesome power of Greed!

He makes a grand gesture with his arms.

CONTENTMENT

Did anything just happen?

GREED

You know the Greed!

BOISTEROUS

I do! I am so greedy of that suit. I want it.

GREED

No, wait. I think I did that wrong.

BOISTEROUS

Pointing his gun at Greed

Give it to me!

GREED

Ahhh!

Greed runs out of the room, followed by Boisterous.

HATE

sarcastically

Nice work, brother.

CONTENTMENT

Karl- you see that the power of Contentment holds Hate at bay and drives off Greed. Get rid of the ring, and you and Anna can be happy.

KARL

Anna...

ANNA

Please, leave me alone.

KARL

What good is money or power or having the entire world sparkling on my finger if I can't have my Anna? I don't want it!

He takes off the ring and throws it away from him. There is a clap of thunder.

HATE

Damn it! I hate losing! And all because of these feelings- No.
This is all because I helped that weak Greed. I hate him.

He exits.

KARL

Anna? It's me... your Karl.

ANNA

Oh Karl- I love you!

They embrace.

AJAX

(from off)

This way! Let's stop Hate.

He sort of runs in followed rather cautiously by Lakrimosa and all her friends. When they're all in, they stop.

They've finally come to help.

CONTENTMENT

Well, as you can see, we managed all right without you.

They all half pretend to be disappointed, but are all relieved.

KARL

What's going on?

ANNA

Who are all these people?

CONTENTMENT

These are all those who have been trying to help you. They care about you... one in particular. Anna, allow me to introduce your mother.

ANNA

Oh my heart! Mother?

LAKRIMOSA

Yes. Oh I've longed for this day.

They embrace. Boisterous runs in, wearing Greed's coat.

BOISTEROUS

Greed ran off after I took this lovely jacket. Now where's Hate?

YOUTH

Dude, they finished that up while you accessorizing.

AGE

Shut up, boy.

BOISTEROUS

Then it's good to be done. Let's do it again sometime!

LAKRIMOSA

Thank you all my friends. You've made this young fairy very happy.

AJAX

It seems as if everything has been neatly wrapped up.

WURZEL

(from off)

I'm coming! I finished my journey.

He enters.

I made it.

LAKRIMOSA

I see you've suffered enough. Be as you should have always remained.

She waves at him, he is transformed from an old man into the farmer he used to be.

WURZEL

I'm me! I'm my own self again! At last my suffering is over. Oh, I've never felt so happy.

LAKRIMOSA

I told you that I would return for the wedding and that you wouldn't regret it.

AJAX

The "snail herder" is here too. What you have sworn has come to pass. Now you and I can be friends- that is, if you keep your end of that bargain...?

He holds out his hand. Wurzel shakes.

WURZEL

With pleasure.

Anna, I'm sorry... for everything. Do you wish to marry this man?

ANNA

More than anything, father!

WURZEL

Karl, I give you my blessing. I wish you both happiness and above all, contentment.

CONTENTMENT

Well said.

WURZEL

And may I ask now who you really are, my gracious cook?

CONTENTMENT

I am Contentment herself.

WURZEL

You are? Then from this day on, let us never again part.

CONTENTMENT

I doubt that we shall.

LAKRIMOSA

I can't give you wealth or diamonds for your dowry, but I can grant you a little spell. Karl- for all your days, a never-ending wealth of catches shall be your blessing, and the grandest of fisher's huts shall be yours.

She waves at them.

AJAX

I don't mean to interrupt this wonderfully happy scene, but I just noticed that it's about 5 minutes to midnight, and-

LAKRIMOSA

Oh dear! Good thing we ran into Hymen at that pub. Quick, they need to be married.

Hymen steps forward and poses the two lovers in a wedding pose.

HYMEN

You can't rush the sanctimonious union of marriage. I'll handle this...

Do you two wish to be married?

ANNA and KARL

Yes!

HYMEN

Then you are married. Kiss.

The look at each other happily and kiss. The assembly applauds.

BOISTEROUS

Bravo! Bravo! Good kiss!

YOUTH

Yeah, way to go man!

AGE

Shut up, boy.

CUPID

Isn't love simply wonderful?

LAKRIMOSIA

Oh, my little girl's all grown up. One day they're just babies you're giving away to some stranger, the next they're getting married.

AJAX

(crying)

Oh, I always cry.

CONTENTMENT

I finally feel... Content.

WURZEL

You know, I feel I've learned a great lesson during these past few days. About avoiding the dangers of Greed and Hate and finding Contentment with true love and good friends. It's as if my tale were a sort of allegory to show others the right way to live.

YOUTH

About time.

WURZEL

If we've all learned our lessons and everybody's happy, then I guess there's nothing left to say but... good night.

The lights fade.

NIGHT

What?

From the front row, Audience Member 1 and Audience Member 2 start applauding and stand up.

AUDIENCE MEMBER 2

So what did you think?

AUDIENCE MEMBER 1

I don't get it.

AUDIENCE 2

What do you mean you don't get it?

AUDIENCE 1

I mean I don't get it.

AUDIENCE 2

It's an allegory. Characters were even named what they represent. They couldn't make it any easier.

AUDIENCE 1

Yeah, what's the deal with that? Who names their kid "Hate"? I mean, your options are kind of limited after that.

AUDIENCE 2

It's not supposed to be literal.

AUDIENCE

That farmer guy was named "Wurzel". What kind of name is that?

AUDIENCE 2

That's the same thing. It's German. It means "root".

AUDIENCE 1

How the hell am I supposed to know that? Why is it in German?

AUDIENCE 2

It's based on an old German play. That's the original name. It means he's solid- of the land and all that.

AUDIENCE 1

Well, what good does it do me in German?

AUDIENCE 2

Because it would sound silly if his name was "Root".

AUDIENCE 1

Why can't they just call him "Bob" or "Walter" or something?

AUDIENCE 2

His name symbolizes what he is in a general sense. Like if we were in a play we'd probably be Audience Member 1 and 2 or something like that.

AUDIENCE 1

Why can't I be Audience Member 1?

AUDIENCE 2

Because I spoke first.

AUDIENCE 1

So?

AUDIENCE 2

Fine, you can be Audience Member 1. It doesn't matter. We're not really in a play. The point is it's not realistic. The names are symbolic and meant to help you get the moral of the play.

AUDIENCE 1

Well, I didn't get it. And the whole plot seemed kind of silly. Why didn't they just go take her away from the farmer and let the kids get married in the first place? The story made no sense.

AUDIENCE 2

That's not really important. Sometimes the whole point is to have some fun. Did you at least think it was funny?

AUDIENCE 1

Yeah. Parts. I still would rather have gone to see a movie.

AUDIENCE 2

Well, next time you pick what we see. Nothing I ever pick is good enough.

AUDIENCE 1

Oh, come on. Don't get upset. Just because I didn't like the show. Let's forget about it and grab a milkshake on the way home.

AUDIENCE 2

Okay.

They start to exit.

AUDIENCE 1

I wish I had a ring that made gold out of thin air.

AUDIENCE 2

Yeah.

AUDIENCE 1

Then I could be the richest and most powerful person in the world. Wouldn't that be cool?

AUDIENCE 2

Yes it would.

THE END.